

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

April 16, 1985

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT DINNER FOR NICARAGUAN REFUGEE FUND

April 15, 1985

J. W. Marriott Hotel
Washington, D.C.

THE PRESIDENT: I want to begin by saying that I'm honored to be in the presence of those who are here from Nicaragua and all the rest of you, too. Many of you have been driven from the land of your birth by a sad turn of history, but you've refused to forget your homeland or abandon your fellow Nicaraguans. And for this, you deserve, and you have, both our high regard and our thanks.

Six years ago, many of you were part of the fight to overthrow an oppressive regime that had ruled your country for decades. You succeeded, the regime fell. And many rejoiced, knowing that true freedom and true democracy would finally rise to take its place.

But the new regime became not a democracy but a dictatorship. Communism was embraced and Nicaragua moved into the Soviet orbit. The best of the revolution, members of the original revolutionary government who had fought for high ideals left the country. In all, more than a quarter of a million souls fled Nicaragua, and they're fleeing still. Many of the refugees are the poorest of the poor, Indians and peasants and terrified mothers and children. All of them need our help. But even more, perhaps, they need the attention of the world. After nearly six years, attention must be paid.

There's so much I want to discuss tonight, from the plight of the refugees to why they're fleeing. I want to talk about what is at stake in Central America, what is at issue and what it means to all of us in this room, in this country and in the West.

I'll start with Nicaragua now, Nicaragua on April 15, 1985.

As you know, the Sandinista dictatorship has taken absolute control of the government and the armed forces. It is a communist dictatorship. It has done what communist dictatorships do, created a repressive state security and secret police organization assisted by Soviet, East German and Cuban advisors; harassed, and in many cases, expunged the political opposition and rendered the democratic freedoms of speech, press and assembly punishable by officially-sanctioned harassment and imprisonment or death.

But the communists are not unopposed. They are facing great resistance from the people of Nicaragua, resistance from the patriots who fight for freedom and their unarmed allies from the pro-democracy movement.

There is growing evidence of Sandinista brutality. We've recently learned that 10 or 11 members of the Social Christian Party have been rounded up and jailed. The Sandinistas are trying to get them to confess to being counter-revolutionaries. And you might be interested in knowing one way the communists are coercing these confessions. They have also arrested more than a hundred relatives of the political prisoners. And according to our most recent information, the Social Christian Party members are being held in the

MORE